

## **“Resurrection Incentive”**

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

I invite you to turn with me in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 15 once again. We've been in a study of this powerful chapter as it deals with the subject of the resurrection. The exciting truth of Christianity is that it is a 'resurrection' faith. It is a supernatural life that is dependent upon the resurrection life of Jesus in the believer. It is what Colossians 1:27 says is 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' And this is something that transcends the grave. A Christian is to someone who is going to live forever. Death is a defeated foe, the grave has been overwhelmed, and it is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that has secured this victory.

We have already seen from this chapter how our gospel is a resurrection gospel, we live with a resurrection hope, and we have a resurrection guarantee. As we come to verse 29, I want to show you how we also have what I refer to as resurrection incentives. In other words, this truth of future resurrection has a very practical impact on how I currently live my life. That God has promised us resurrection has a very powerful influence on our thinking and living. This is what Paul is explaining to the Corinthians in these verses.

To illustrate this, go through the New Testament and see how the hope of resurrection impacted the way that the early church gave witness to Christ. Just consider Stephen in Acts 7 as an example. Here is a man who was put to death for his testimony. Do you think for one second that he would have offered himself to the stones if he didn't believe he had something far better in Christ than this world could offer him? As his persecutors were doing their best to destroy him, he's praying for their forgiveness. How can a man do something like that if he didn't have a hope that went far beyond the 'stuff' of this life? The answer is that

he couldn't, neither would he. Those whose affections are in heaven are the quickest to part with the comforts of this life because they realize in Christ they have something far better. This is emphasis of Hebrews 11, the great hall of faith chapter.

**Hebrews 11:35—“...Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.”**

They were willing to part ways with the distractions of this life because they had a resurrection incentive. This is the same argument made by Paul in the verses that we now come to in our study of 1 Corinthians 15. There are four 'incentives' that I want to point out from the text.

### **1—Incentive to FACE the future with joy (15:20-28)**

*“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ...”*

I won't spend too much time here, given the fact that we have already looked at these verses. Consider the point that Paul has made through verse 25, the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead and is the firstfruits of a future harvest. The guarantee of future resurrection gives us an incentive to face the future, not with a sense of fear and dread, but with a sense of joy and eager enthusiasm.

We don't have to walk around like Eeyore, with a sense of melancholy and drab, gray outlook on life. You remember when Piglet or Tigger or Winnie the Pooh

would say to him, “Good morning!” Eeyore would usually respond by saying, “Well, I suppose it is...for some.”

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow! Because He lives, all fear is gone! We sing those lyrics often, but I wonder if we really understand what we’re saying. The fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is risen gives me hope and joy for the future. I don’t have to worry over what the future might or might not hold because I know the very One who holds the future. Worry is essentially fear of the future. Everything that a person worries about concerns an unknown element about the future. Jesus had a lot to say about that:

**Matthew 6:25—“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”**

In ten verses, Jesus tells us not to worry no less than three times:

- Do not be anxious about your life (v. 25)
- Therefore, do not be anxious about necessities (v. 31)
- Do not be anxious about tomorrow (v. 34)

**“Anxious”** —*word is ‘merimnao’ and means to be troubled with cares; seeking to promote one’s own interests*

**Philippians 4:6—“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”**

When Jesus says, “Do not be anxious,” He is commanding us against having a divided mind that is torn between what is real and what is possible, what is immediate and what is potential. He is saying that we are not to be anxious with

this temporal world around us and the issues associated with it. Keep in mind what He said in the preceding verses—“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...You cannot serve God and money.”

Focusing on earthly treasures produces earthly affections. Rather than being captivated by the temporary things of this life, my mind and my heart is to be captivated by resurrection hope in Christ. Since I have been raised with Christ, I am free from a life filled with fear and anxiety.

**Colossians 3:1-2—“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”**

Belief in the resurrection ought to affect our attitudes toward this present life. A mind that is preoccupied with fear and worry is always inconsistent with resurrection faith. The fact that I have already been raised with Christ is to radically change the way I approach life in the world. We now live with the motivation of future glory.

## **2—Incentive to FOLLOW Christ in baptism (15:29)**

*“Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?”*

Upon first glance, this verse might seem somewhat strange and peculiar. It very well may be the strangest verse in the New Testament. Mormons have developed the practice of vicarious baptism from this verse, claiming that a person cannot enter heaven until a Mormon is baptized for them by proxy. We can rule that out because it has never been a belief or practice of orthodox Christianity. Others have suggested that it refers to a practice of washing the

dead in preparation for burial. But if we consider the context of what Paul has been saying, I believe it becomes clear that he is showing how pointless baptism would be if the dead did not rise. If there were no resurrection, Christ would not be raised and would still be dead. Why then be baptized in His name? Baptism itself is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. If there were no resurrection, then baptism would be nothing more than a pointless ritual.

The language of ‘baptism’ is used in the New Testament to describe the way that the Christian has been immersed into the life of God. It is descriptive of the vital union that a true believer has in Christ. Paul writes in Romans:

**Romans 6:3-4—“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”**

The Bible says that all of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ have been ‘baptized’ into Him. Now, this is not a reference to water baptism, which is but a picture of the spiritual reality that Paul is talking about. What he is saying here is that believers have been immersed into the life of Christ. Our identity is united with His so much so that what is true of Him is true of us. He died and we died with Him. He rose from the dead to a new kind of life, and so have we! Look at verse 5 of that same passage:

*“For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His.”*

Notice the word ‘united’ there. It is a horticultural term, like where you’d take branches off of one tree and graft them into another tree. When you accept

Christ, the Spirit takes the dead branch of your life and grafts it into Christ's living vine and His life starts to flow into you.

You will notice that Paul says our union with Christ involves both a negative and positive. The verses that follow are an explanation of this.

United with Him in a death like His (Rom. 6:6-7)

*"We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin."*

He says in verse 6 that we 'know' that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to it.

**"Old Self"** —*person you were before your conversion*

The 'old me,' who I was in Adam, was crucified with Christ and was buried in death. That's how I have died to sin.

**"Body of Sin"** —*should be understood as the part of our fallen humanity that is yet to be redeemed*

Who I was in Adam was crucified with Christ in order that indwelling sin, which is still very much with me, may be rendered inoperative. What this means practically is this—just as Jesus did not serve sin, neither must we as those who are now identified with Him.

United with Him in a resurrection like His (Rom. 6:8-10)

*"Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no*

*longer has dominion over Him. For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.”*

In a negative sense, the ‘old me’ is crucified with Christ so that the power of sin is broken in my life. And in a positive sense, the ‘new me’ has been raised to live with Christ. If it is true that we (old self) have died with Christ, then we can be sure that we also will live with Him. The idea is the it is something of which you and I can be certain. We are in possession of His life now, and we are waiting on future bodily resurrection. It is true of us because of Christ.

He will never die again, and death no longer has dominion over Him. Notice the emphasis of verse 10, “For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God.”

**Revelation 1:18—“I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hell.”**

Since the ‘old me’ is crucified with Christ, the ‘new me’ is now alive and free! We now walk in newness of life. This same truth under the microscope here in this text is also expressed in other places in the New Testament:

**Galatians 2:20—“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**

**Ephesians 2:4-6—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”**

**Colossians 3:1-4—“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”**

Look at the repetition of the word ‘know’ in Romans 6. It shows us the importance of what we believers understand and believe. Paul was absolutely convinced that Christian living depends on Christian learning, and that duty follows doctrine. These are truths that we ought to know very well. Our confidence depends upon it. He says, “It is important that you know what has been done for you in Christ, for what you then do as a Christian is an extension of this truth.”

**D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** — *“He is showing us clearly what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ. Until we are clear about that, we shall never be clear about our own position, and consequently shall never get victory in our lives. This is a most important principle; this is how the NT deals with us and our problems and our difficulties. It never starts with them directly. What the NT tells you to do always, in the first instance, is to forget yourself altogether—to forget all your problems, your temptations, your difficulties, everything else; to forget yourself and look at the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider first what happened to Him, consider first His relationship to sin. Then when you have got that clear, the next step is to say, ‘I am joined to Him, and what is true of Him is true of me.’”*

And so coming back to Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 15:29, why be baptized at all if the dead are not raised? None of these spiritual realities would be true of us if Jesus Christ were not raised. And water baptism, which is a picture of all that, would be nothing but a pointless exercise.

### **3—Incentive to FORFEIT personal comfort (15:30-32)**

*“Why are we in danger every hour? I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”*

The hope of resurrection is a powerful incentive in the heart of a believer that leads them to forfeit personal comfort and give themselves sacrificially to gospel causes. It is for this reason they embrace present suffering. If there were no resurrection, why would a person live for anything beyond himself? That is the point being emphasizing here in these verses. The one who lives with future resurrection in view is cognizant of the fact that this life is very brief. The time is coming when I will stand before the judgment seat of Christ where I will be rewarded and held accountable for the stewardship I have been given. What I do in this life has major implications of my life to come. Awareness of this impacts how I live my life on a daily basis.

If there were no resurrection, Paul asks the question, “Why are we in danger every hour?” Why am I risking my safety and comfort in this life? It would be a waste if there were not something greater than this. In contrast, he says, “I die every day!” In other words, I lay my life down in obedience to Christ each and every day in light of the glorious fact that I will one day be resurrected. What was his experience?

**2 Corinthians 11:24-28—“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger**

**from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”**

When I read that, I can't help but be convicted over the way I easily complain when I am inconvenienced. We often try to take the path of least resistance. Our main concern is to elevate our own levels of personal comfort and happiness. What can I do today to fulfill my desires? How can I have my best life now? Let me tell you something—the apostle Paul lived his life with a radically different approach. What can I do today to lay my life down for the One who gave Himself for me? How can I take up my cross today and follow Jesus? Without the hope of resurrection, that kind of living would be nonsensical. But when you live with the understanding that the resurrection brings, life takes on an entirely different dynamic.

**2 Corinthians 4:8-18—“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies...knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence...So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”**

And then he goes on to say in the very next chapter:

**2 Corinthians 5:1 — “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”**

Paul says this is why we press on in our faith. This is why I lay my life down. If I didn't have anything to look forward to beyond this life, why would I risk anything? He says in verse 32, “If the dead are not raised, Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” That is the prevailing attitude of the world. Knowing who we are and what we have in Christ is the ultimate incentive to let go of the ‘stuff’ of this life that the world constantly tells us is most important.

**C.S. Lewis** — *“Like a good chess player, Satan is always trying to maneuver you into a position where you can save your castle only by losing your bishop.”*

I don't know very much about chess. However, I do know that it is a game of strategy that involves maneuvering and strategies that force us into making a choice. Lewis used two pieces in his illustration, the Castle (Rook) and the Bishop. ‘Castles’ are strongholds of secular power, built to protect and maintain that power. ‘Bishops’ represent faith handed down over centuries, generation to generation. On the chessboard, Castles are more powerful than Bishops. When faced with a choice, a player will most often sacrifice a Bishop in order to save the more powerful Castle.

Satan would like to do the same to us. Satan wants us in positions where we will sacrifice Bishops to save Castles. He wants us to sacrifice matters of faith in order to save our worldly achievements or possessions. But not Paul. Rather than settling for a castle made of sand, Paul says, “I die daily!” Because of this

resurrection hope with which he lived, Paul refused to sacrifice the eternal Bishop for the temporary Castle. What about you?

#### **4—Incentive to FORSAKE sin for holiness (15:33-34)**

*“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’ Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.”*

The resurrection provides us with an incentive to forsake sin and pursue holiness in our day to day living. To live as if this world were all that there is would be to live under a delusion. Thus, Paul warns the church against deception that comes from keeping company with wrong philosophy. What we think and what we believe determines how we will live. So instead of following the world in its thinking, they were to wake up and live soberly. He calls them to live a repentant lifestyle that does not go on sinning. There were some in their ranks who had no saving knowledge of God, and Paul says, “I say this to your shame. You Corinthians have gotten a hold of some bad theology, associating with those who deny the resurrection. And in this denial of the resurrection, you have lost your motive to pursue personal holiness of life.”

So what he is saying to them is this—If you all entertain thoughts that deny the resurrection, it’s going to have a direct impact on the way you live your life. If there is no resurrection, then there is no accountability. If there is no accountability, then there is no need to take sin seriously. Live however you want to live, do whatever you want to do, because it all ends with the grave.

**John MacArthur** — *“Thucydides, one of the ancient writers, records how there was a deadly plague that came to the city of Athens, and people committed every shameful crime and eagerly engaged in every lustful pleasure because they*

*believed life was short and there was no resurrection so they would have no price to pay for their crimes.”*

Take away this idea life to come, take away the fact of resurrection, and you have just removed the ultimate incentive of accountability. But a true knowledge of God tells us otherwise.

This truth of future resurrection is a powerful incentive that drastically changes the way a person lives his life. It gives me joy as far as the future is concerned. It makes baptism and obedience to Jesus much more pressing. It means that my personal comfort in this life is not what ultimately matters. It teaches me to forsake sin in pursuit of personal holiness.

**Jim Elliot**—*“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”*

This past week, I found myself reading up on the life of a fellow by the name of Richard Cameron who lived in the 1600’s. He was a leading figure in a group known as the Covenanters, which was a bunch of Scottish Presbyterians who resisted the king of England’s attempts to control the church of Scotland. In defiance of the king’s state church, Richard Cameron would preach out in the fields to those who would gather together even though it came at a great price for them to do so. On July 22, 1680, he and a group of evangelical believers were meeting for worship out on the moor when they were surrounded by the king’s troops. Richard Cameron was killed. The soldiers cut off his head and cut off his hands, which they took into the nearby town. They took them to his father, and in an effort to intimidate him, they showed him the severed head and the hands and asked, “Do you know who these belong to?” To which Alan Cameron responded, “I know them, I know them! They are my son’s, my own dear son’s! It is the

Lord. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me or mine, but has made His goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.”

How could a man respond in such a way, unless he knew something personally about the hope of resurrection? He knew that his son, though brutally murdered on the moors of Scotland, was more alive than he had ever been before. And one day, he would walk with him again in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. I'd say that is a pretty good incentive, wouldn't you? Let's pray.

*“Our Father in heaven, we praise You for the glorious truth of the resurrection and for the incentive it brings to our lives as Christian men and women. Because Jesus has been raised, believers have also been raised. There is nothing more wonderful than to know that we have been brought into inseparable union with Christ through faith. The hope that we have in Him far surpasses anything that this world has to offer. In Jesus' name, Amen.”*